

Ray focus of movies, marketing

■ As King's assassin lies ill in a state prison, time grows short for profiteers

By **KIRK LOGGINS**

Staff Writer

It's been almost a year now since James Earl Ray, the convicted assassin of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., was taken to Nashville Memorial Hospital for treatment of liver disease.

Ray, 69, has made the trip from prison to hospital and back several times since last Dec. 22, and he has already outlived the predictions of some of the doctors who evaluated him for a liver transplant earlier this year.

While Ray is in poor health, efforts to profit from continuing questions about the King assassination and Ray's role in it appear to be flourishing.

The civil rights leader's widow and son have endorsed Ray's quest for a trial — and they have signed a marketing contract with Time Warner for King's name and speeches, as well as an agreement with filmmaker Oliver Stone for a possible movie about King's assassination in Memphis in 1968.

People associated with Ray are also working — on a smaller scale — on movie and marketing deals tied to the King murder case and to Ray's need for a liver transplant.

Two of them, former Nashville songwriter Gary Revel and Baltimore "comedian/actor" Mike Ga-

bril, sought media attention here last week for their respective ideas. Revel, who worked as an investigator for Ray's one-time lawyer, Jack Kershaw, is trying to put together a movie deal, based on his involvement in investigating the King assassination in the late 1970s. Revel, now a securities dealer in Los Angeles, wants to call the film *The Slew the Dreamer* — the title of a song he and Kershaw's now-deceased wife wrote in 1977 about Ray's claim that he was an unwitting scapegoat in a conspiracy to kill King.

Revel, 48, says he believes that organized-crime figures plotted with high government officials to assassinate King, who began speaking out against U.S. military involvement in Vietnam in 1967. The organized crime leaders' main concern was keeping a steady supply of heroin flowing into the United States from Southeast Asia, Revel said.

Chery Ivy, a Las Vegas-based fund-raiser, invited local news orga-

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nizations to Mayor Phil Bredesen's film production office last Tuesday for what was billed as a news conference about plans for a movie based on Revel's story.

Vicki Oglesby, who heads the mayor's film office, nixed plans for a news conference in the city facility, but she met with Ivy, Revel and Kershaw to discuss local film production services.

"We are only allowed to facilitate films that are fully funded and ready to go," Oglesby explained. "This is not the way it is usually done."

Ivy said Tuesday that she expected a California company called World Entertainment to begin filming the movie here in April, with a budget of \$20 million.

She compared the film's appeal to Stone's JFK and the recent *Conspiracy Theory*, and she said she'd like to see Patrick Swayze play the lead role, based on Revel, with Reba McEntire as the investigator's wife.

"We have the Hollywood gold now merging with a little Southern town, Nashville... We have some of Nashville's finest who will be some of the principal investors," Kershaw said.

Ivy said in an interview Thursday that the movie will cost about \$15 million to produce.

"I know we have that much lined up. We have some Japanese investors."

But Kershaw said in an interview Friday that financing the movie "is not a done deal."

World Entertainment is just a name at present, Kershaw said, but he plans to file incorporation papers for the company here "as soon as possible."

Los Angeles-based director/pro-

ducer William Sachs, who has an option to buy Revel's story, said in an interview Friday that funding for the movie is still up in the air.

"We have people wanting to finance it. They seem very definite about wanting to do it, but in the movie business anything can happen. You learn that nothing is certain until the check has cleared the bank and you've spent the money."

Sachs said the movie could be produced for "up to \$15 million, depending on who is in it."

Sachs, 35, who has produced and directed a number of movies, said he has confirmed much of Revel's story in news accounts and books about the King assassination.

"I don't want it to be a political story. I don't see it politically. I see it as the story of a guy who got a part-time job investigating for a lawyer and he got in over his head."

Sachs said he believes that Ray

"was involved" in the King assassination, "but he didn't pull the trigger."

"I'm not trying to say he's a good guy. He's not a good guy."

Gabriel, on the other hand, says that Ray is a great guy who "treats me like the son he's never had."

"I personally think that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the greatest men that ever lived, but I firmly believe in James Earl Ray's innocence. He was framed."

Gabriel, 28, said he recently moved to Nashville so that he can make daily visits to Ray at the Tennessee Correction Department's Lois M. DeBerry Special Needs Facility.

He said he first contacted Ray as a "joke," when he was trying to compile a book about the fictional practice of "cat yoga" in the early 1990s.

"I was doing my cat yoga routine, and I started working on a book saying there really were temples in Tibet where cats wore turbans and



RAY

COURTS

▶ Ray trial awaits judge recusal, on 2A.

▶ Commentary, on 5D.

NATION

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This a photo of Mike Gabriel taken from his Web site, which can be found at www.catyoga.com.

sat in the lotus position. I sent James Earl Ray a letter, asking him if he would be willing to do the foreword to my book."

Gabriel said Ray responded that he "was real busy working on his appeal" and didn't know anything about yoga.

But, he said, that began an exchange of letters and telephone calls, which led to Gabriel's visiting Ray a number of times in prison — and to his moving here last month to live.

"I am here for however long he needs me," Gabriel said Friday in an interview. "If he had not taken ill, I would probably be moving to Hollywood. There's not enough full-time show business and film work in Maryland."

Among Gabriel's claims to fame are a bit part in the movie *Forrest*

FAMILIAR ?

THE PURPOSE WAS TO GET MY WEB SITE LISTED SO THEY CAN FIND OUT HOW TO SEND MONEY TO TRUTH + JUSTICE FUND
I HAVE THE ADRETS POSTED IN THE WEB SITE